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ABSTRACT

There are several ways practitioners and theorists can collaborate to find unity of expression for the purpose of beneficial educational change or "transformation." These include dealing with educational issues common to both; presenting a more defined, organized front to the public; and providing a regular forum for discussions and debates about the common elements found in the ongoing work of practitioners and theorists. Practitioners are in the position to lead the assessment work that reveals a need for alterations and refinements in the educational programs or in the operations of the organization. The theorist is in the position to identify a range of options that might be appropriate for the intended alterations and refinements directly related to human conditions. (JAM)

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COLLABORATION AND CHANGE

A Presentation on Saturday, February 24, 1990
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by

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COLLABORATION AND CHANGE

I appreciate the opportunity to address this group today. To me, this topic is far more complex than one might imagine at first glance. Among a number of things, however, today's discussions could provide a springboard for both practitioners and theorists to try again to establish new relationships. Such a successful arrangement could eventually produce results that would once more cause our critics to lower their voices until, at least, the next generation. According to my observations, almost every generation of educators has been challenged by critics who claim that we are not as effective as we should be; that the cost for what we do is too high; that students are poorly motivated and learn little; and that there are many throughout society who can do better, what we do, than we do.

Last year at this meeting in Orlando, Ted Sizer stood before a general session and proclaimed, "Now is the time for truth telling." I appreciated all that he had to say but I particularly liked that statement. For if we do exactly that - together - theorists and practitioners - we will look very good while describing a more <u>comprehensive</u> approach to educating all students in our society than any country has ever done before. We will be able to demonstrate that academic standards have their basis in the inclusion of students in the educational process and do <u>not</u> stem from the ex-

clusion of those learners that do not reach the state of giftedness or somewhere near it. You see, I don't believe we are second rate in education in this country and I certainly don't believe that prosperity over time can be maintained in a society that neglects the education of a number of its members. Further, "truth-telling" can expose the fact that special interest groups around the country are speaking in a much, much louder voice today than we are as educators. Like, Henny-Pinney who ran about proclaiming that "the sky is falling" we, too, are about to be lead into a similar cave that houses just as vicious a wolf. Yes, we do need to collaborate and to change in obvious and calculated ways. Yes, we do need to "labor together," to find a common language that prevents practitioners and theorists from being used against each other and, sometimes, to the benefit of our critics.

I come to you today as a practitioner so much of my thinking and many of my observations are from that perspective. I full well realize that to start on this topic will, at various points, call forth an interest to differ and a need to compromise. I believe we need to develop tolerance at such times, not for the purpose of finding the ideal, but for the purpose of beginning a more defined process of collaboration and change that will benefit us all; especially, our students.

Let us first look at the term "change." There seems to be at least three definitions used by educators. One is, "to make different in some particular"; another is, "to make radically different," and the last is "to transform." Having been a language teacher at one time, I am usually curious as to the match between the word or phrase chosen to the actual processes and outcomes we really seek. Because of this curiosity, I believe I have observed that all three definitions are currently operational in the minds and activities of educators while only one seems to be predominate in the minds of citizens, board members, and politicians. In my opinion, the definition of "radically different" best describes the current mentality in society. Further, it seems to me that such definition is motivated by <u>two</u> different purposes, both major, in the various groups in society. The <u>first</u> purpose is to do much more for much less (a fiscal concern). The <u>second</u> is to bend the moldable in society away from the industrial age and into the age of technology (still fundamentally a fiscal concern but much more obscure than the first). As is often the case when fiscal issues come to the very front of concerns, throw-away activity is not foreign to "making a radical change" for a grand purpose. In my opinion, we have stepped on to that road, to a greater or lesser degree, around the country today. In education, at all levels, we are dangerously close to massive "throw-away"

situations with students throughout our schools and universities. This has come about due, primarily, to change that makes things "radically different." It is motivated by a single dimension view or consideration of economic issues and fiscal matters that defines education solely as an expense rather than an investment on which there is a return to both the individual and to society.

The last few statements that I have made to you have done little more than summarize some conditions that we all see and feel. So why do that? Because I want each of you to seriously consider the fact that "change" as I have just used it relates only to the industrial complex, the military dimension of society, and the world of business. Collectively, educators have not been and are not today using the correct term to best describe what it is that we do in education for an emerging society. We do not do things effectively in a radical manner and we all know that!

Let me come back to the word "transformation" that I referred to earlier. The term could just as easily be "alteration," "refinement," or "improvement." These are the terms for educators! They parallel the idea of "change" of society. Oh yes, I know, like elementary children on the playground, we are chided by some in society about our use of these soft, abstract terms. However, in my opinion, that is a basic battle that we must fight together. We need to establish the

understanding that there are real issues in education that are more productively dealt with by utilizing the processes implied in these terms. We know that the process of effective education represents a continuum stretched over time. Figuratively speaking, to inject a major or radical disruption in that continuum is somewhat like a shipwreck at sea which destroys a useful ship and leaves the sailors in a chaotic state in the life boats.

Those of us who have been in education for some time have seen circumstances and have participated in activities wherein alterations and refinements have been made efficiently and productively. At other times, we have seen similar efforts made with far fewer results. What was the difference in the two basic approaches used in the "change process?" The answer rests in four basic issues found in people in most organizations. Perhaps, these can be best seen in question form. If so, they are:

(1) How will what you want to do effect my <u>life-style</u>? (By nature, I like routine and activities that I know and presently do.)

(2) How will what you want to do effect my <u>ownership</u> within this organization? (It has taken me awhile to gain some empowerment and I only need more not less.)

(3) How will what you want to do effect my <u>control</u> of

some matters? (I like my schedule and the planning time I have.)

(4) How much of what you want to do will be a "re-run" of some past activity in which I had to participate? (I have had a number of supervisors so this is not the first time for "change processes" with me.)

Life-style, ownership, control, and "re-runs"....all terms that I imagine most of us use in our daily lives. Yet, when we approach those employed in an educational setting about the "change process," we some how believe that these fundamental human conditions are not present or, at best, very secondary to the grand purpose contained in the proposed change.

We have just arrived in the arena in which I believe that change and collaboration should come together. This arena establishes the opportunity....no, the need....it is really becoming a desperate need....for theorists and practitioners to work together in a mutually complimenting way. The practitioner is in the position to lead the assessment work which reveals a need for alterations and refinements in the educational program or in the operations of the organization. The theorist is in the position to identify a range of options that might be appropriate for the intended alterations and refinements. As the options are presented by the

theorist, it is obvious that there is no intent to necessarily disturb the human conditions mentioned above. In short, there is little opportunity to politicize any of the "change process." Obviously, the actual tasks of the practitioners and theorists in any given situation can be defined in a variety of ways as long as those tasks that more directly relate to the human conditions are handled by the theorist. Also, the "change process" itself should be designed in such a way as to allow each individual directly effected by the work at hand to handle much of their own activity as related to life-style, ownership, control, and "re-runs." (Give verbal example - commencing of curriculum study - first develop material of "what is" currently.)

The foregoing suggests that in this basic arena one need for collaboration is found in the provision of some additional people (theorists) with different organizational interests and affiliations. These people, quite naturally, provide a different group dynamic than would be the case without them. Also, they provide an expertise in knowledge or certain skills that are probably not available within the organization at hand. Let me not leave you with the idea that this is the only arena because there are many more. However, past experience reveals that the other arenas are not as difficult or delicate to define or to design. Such things as, assessment tools, special knowledge about programs

and operations, research information, and other such things are more routinely provided once the basic relationships and expectations among people are defined for collaboration. So how do I define collaboration? Collaboration is, as I implied earlier, a "laboring together" in an intellectual endeavor in a mutually complimenting fashion.

We can do that, you know? I believe it is time to step-up the pace!

In summary, let me say that the manner in which people are presently regarded in society is not conducive to handling change and collaboration as I have stated it. We need to try to exert more influence in society in this regard!

As applied to education, change is an intellectual process sensitive to human conditions. We need to be more "together" with increased publications and research on this issue. It needs to be "targeted" as a priority issue throughout the field of education.

And finally, because we use two general terms, "theorists and practitioners," to describe our professional emphases and work in separate environments, we need to better deal with issues common to all of us within our group and present a more defined, organized front to all of our publics. We need to seriously consider further refinement of organizations, or at least meeting times, that have as their fundamental purpose that of providing a regular forum for

discussions and debates about the common elements found in the on-going work of theorists and practitioners. It seems obvious to me that our futures will be more productive and rewarding when we accomplish these things.